A DRAG WITH THE OLD ESSEX

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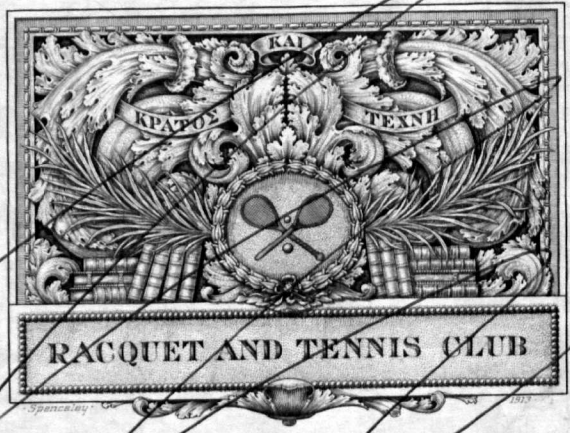

PRESENTED BY

Arthur A. Fowler, Esq.

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Hunting- Fox

Fowler

By the same author

THE BALLAD OF MYRA GRAY

THE SONG OF THE SALMON RIVER

THE BOAST OF THE SALMON FLY

THE BATTLE OF HEISER'S HILL

WITH THE GUNS AT GARDINER'S ISLAND

THE ROSE OF OLDWICK

ALL'S SWELL THAT ENDS SWELL

(*An old playbill*)

A DRAG
WITH THE OLD ESSEX

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A DRAG
WITH THE OLD ESSEX

BY

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NEW YORK
PRIVATELY PRINTED
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To

THAT GOOD SPORTSMAN

CHARLES PFIZER, M. F. H.

AND ALL THE MEMBERS OF THE ESSEX HUNT
WHO RODE SO GALLANTLY IN THE OLD DRAG

Remember the Master's customary remark after any fall: "After a manner of speaking, he has had an experience. To such an extent that will teach him to have respect for upstanding timber."

NOTE

THE author was persuaded to print an edition of two hundred and fifty copies of this poem for distribution among those of his friends who were associated with the Essex Hunt under the Mastership of Charles Pfizer. The memories of riders and horses recalled by these verses may, it is hoped, prove sufficient warrant for their publication in this form.

A DRAG
WITH THE OLD ESSEX

A DRAG WITH THE OLD ESSEX

PART I

A number of middle-aged sportsmen are sitting round the table after dinner. The port passes from hand to hand, and memory wakes in mellow recollection of old hunting-days that are gone. The Host gets to his feet, lifts his glass, and speaks:

A drag with the Essex.
My word! What a thrill
It gives to us old ones
To think of it still.

The country was open,
The galloping fast,
The fences upstanding,
Pace held till the last.

Charles Pfizer, the Master,
Showed sport that was fine.
The better, the faster,
The stiffer the line.

His stables were ample
And full of the best;
All leppers and stayers
And fit for the test.

Duke of York was his favorite,
Sir Ellerslie, too,
Old Glenvaloch potent,
And Bonnets of Blue.

Yourfellow and Ascot,
Sweet Primrose so gay;
Diana and Vulcan,
They'd show you the way!

Silent Bliss and Carnation,
Fixed Star—Golden Chance,
Could beat all creation
And lead you a dance.

Old Article, headstrong,
And Sunbeam so bright,
Red Warrior, and Cinders,
Would stay with first flight.

No horseman, if ardent,
And keen on the sport,
Need lack for a gallop
On a "lepper" of sorts.

"Open house!" was his motto,
The Kennels were gay;
After hunting, a dinner
And a bed, if you'd stay.

Mrs. Pfizer as hostess,
With Lulu, nineteen,
Was gracious and charming,
And ruled like a Queen.

So here's to Charles Pfizer,
And the days we recall,
The father of hunting
Where Essex holds thrall!

All stand and drink to the toast.

PART II

THE NARRATOR SPEAKS

The Meet was fixed for Mendham
At the Crossroads by the Inn.
The Blackhorse Tavern stood across
With food and drink within.

Dick Conroy, best of dragmen,
An hour or two ago
Had driven past in shabby rig
To the starting-point below.

And now with Tommy Madden
The Master dashes up
In a four-wheeled trap
And great top-coat
With buttons large as cups.

Slowly and stiff he clambers out
And stiffly turns his head;
Off comes the top-coat heavy,
And underneath gleams red.

Gleaming he stands in scarlet,
Veteran of many wars,
Stiffnecked from ancient crowners,
Bravely he bears his scars.

Now follows Walter Goodwin,
Wizened with horseman's work,
Mounted on old Red Warrior,
And leading Duke of York.

Now is the time appointed,
And jogging up the street,
The hounds with Willie Howard
Come eager to the Meet.

The Master mounts—

There sits the Master on Duke of York,
Stern-visaged but of gleaming eye
He watches his hounds go jogging by.
His orange collar seems to float
Vivid against his scarlet coat,
His high starched stock shows white as milk,
And his leather breeches shine like silk.

Next to arrive is Jack Wilmerding,
Hunt Secretary for many a year.
A real eccentric, without fear,
Full of quaint oddities and wiles,
He warms our hearts and stirs our smiles.
His kit is never twice the same,
Always it's varied, never tame.
To-day he wears a beaver hat,
Canary waistcoat, blue cravat,
A harrier coat of bottle green,
Worn by much use to glossy sheen,
His corded breeches ribbed like steel,
And glistening raspers on his heels,
His old-time garters pulled in bow,
Covered with paste till white as snow.
The Master's right-hand man, he knows it,
In fact, he never fails to show it.
He counts the field en route to cover
And writes the log when runs are over.
Each rider and his mount recorded,
And quaintly, too, the story's worded.
His temper oft a trifle tart,
We love him for his kindly heart;
Our Jack is something of a pickle.

But now here comes the great Ben Nicoll,
Strong he is as an Ayrshire bull.
He loves a horse that wants to pull.
Heavy of hand and body, too,
A centaur with a seat like glue,
First flight's the only place for Ben.
And if he falls he'll come again.
No line of country ever stopped him,
He ate the fences as he popped 'em.
On Lenox or some other hunter
He'd pound the field with any punter;
Ever courageous, ever gay,
He loved to show us all the way.

And now comes George Messervy on Bloomington—
A sportsman of a different type.
Complexion like a plum that's ripe,
Austere but of distinguished mien,
A personage he's plainly seen.
Black Melton is the coat he wears,
And ladies tremble at his glares.
His eye is cold as any oyster,
But then you know he hunts in Leicester.
He's travelled oft across the water,
And almost married Lord North's daughter.
One time they say he went to Pau.
My! how he made those Frenchmen go.
On Bloomington he gallops straight,
And never stops for fence or gate.

Who is this on the well-bred dun?
Barney Schley! You son of a gun!
Lightish of hair and light of hand,
He is the boy to get over the land.
He loves his dear dun as he loves his own brother;
When he bids him good night they kiss one another;
At least that's the story the stable-boys tell,
And it's certainly true, Limerick carries him well.

Kenneth, too, on David Gray,
Ready to gallop and ready to stay.
"Wot, Wot!" he says with a look of surprise
And a kindly smile in his bright blue eyes.

Now comes Van on a great big black—
Mogul his name and he looks like a hack,
But crossing the country he meets every test
And gallops and leps with the best of the best.

And here comes tall Dick Williams,
Long of body and long of limbs;
A regular Leicestershire type he looks—
You'll find his picture in one of the books.
His shining topper towers above,
And his shadbelly coat fits him just like a glove.
He never hurries, his time he bides,
Sure of himself as the gray he rides.

But here comes the tallest man of all,
Six foot four, on big Bacchanal.
Captain Tom Hollond is his name;
Later a General of British fame.
Mounted on Bacchanal, rakish and tough,
He looks like business, sure enough.

Fred Bull on Gloversville—
A high-strung man on a high-strung horse,
Ready to hunt or gallop a course,
Potomac, his sire, and Folly, his dam,
A National chaser or I'll be damned.
A second horseman fondles the neck
Of Rockcress, his stable mate, kept for the check.

As gay as a girl on the way to a dance,
Gurdon Maynard comes up on Golden Chance.
A rider of races—a good one to hounds,
He sits Golden Chance, who perpetually bounds.
A high-jumping show-horse, he laughs at the drag,
And over the fences he leaps like a stag.

Charlotte Barnes on Billy the Bold;
She's hunted in Ireland, so I'm told.
A cross of trotter on hackney blood,
Though not much to look at, he surely is good.
He's really a wonder at hopping the rails.
They pick the best goer and follow his tails.

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Geharis dances up with Leonce Fuller,
A broken-down chaser, a terrible puller.
Gentleman or jockey, who could tell,
He sits his horse and sits him well.
He buys his hunters from off the track,
And only will fuss with a clean-bred crack.
With racing-saddle and racing-seat,
He goes like the wind when he is not on his feet.
With the mind of a poet and heart of a lion,
There's none in the field more beloved than Leon.

Francis Stevens, riding the gray,
In former times a sportsman gay.
A farmer now he's much more serious,
A transformation rather curious.
So week-days Grayday drags the plough,
But some days rides the drag as now.
Beware his wheat, beware his cattle,
Unless you want to fight a battle.
As every sportsman ought to know,
Farmers must be considered so.

Grafton Pyne on John.
Light-hearted, smiling, and debonair,
Young Grafton comes out to take the air.
He rides like a demon at post and rail,
And few can catch him when he sets sail.

Cleland, his groom, on Golden Picture,
Studgroom, Coper, and Whip, all three.
Bill Cleland's a horseman, bold as can be;
At least we can't see how he could be much bolder,
For he rode through one drag with a well-broken shoulder.
He buys 'em cheap and sells 'em dear,
He'll make his fortune, never fear.

Chatting and laughing, devil-may-care,
Here comes a queerly assorted pair.
Dongan de Peyster on Patsy small,
Billy Cammann on Thorndale tall.
A heavy man on a little mare,
The other fellow with weight to spare.

Fred Jones on Vulcan.
Here's a bit of a sporting print,
His old bell topper without a dint,
Shadbellied coat as black as a crow,
This is a pair that should surely go.

Florence Jones on Caliban,
And Chalmers Wood on Raritan.
Two good hunters, piloted well,
They know the whole business
And gallop like hell.

Morris Kellogg on Danny, too,
Glasses fixed on his eyes of blue,
Chin stuck out and full of vim,
Nothing can stop either Danny or him.

Jack Walker on board the flea-bitten gray,
Smart, but like business in every way.
The politest man in all the field,
Ready to lead or ready to yield.

Herbert Barry ambles up on Saber.
A cavalry leader you'd opine,
A Southern soldier in every line,
Horseman and sportsman every inch,
You'd count him certain in any pinch.

Everett Colby on the big black;
Broad is his smile and broad is his back,
Loose in his seat and reins held slack,
But wait till you see him gallop the line,
His heart's as big as a Norway pine.

Seymour Cromwell on Queen Bess,
A great big man on a great big mare;
She can lep all the fences with plenty to spare.
She's blind in one eye, but she jumps like the devil,
And carries top weight at good pace on the level.

Alec Phillips trotting up on Whisky,
Both looking very gay and frisky.
He gossips hard at covertside,
But when he gallops watch him ride.

Quietly ambling along the lane,
With him comes Lady Augusta Fane.
On Ascot she sits as straight as a tree,
Top-hatted, veiled, as smart as can be.
The chestnut's fast and jumps like sin,
You can bet your buttons they'll both be in.

Here comes Bert Hyde on Laminster.
Built like a horseman, light and slim,
With lines like the thoroughbred under him.
Few go as straight and none go faster,
Here is the man who'll some day be Master.
It takes him two hours to get into his kit,
And now that he's in it, just look at the fit.

And now Arthur Hagen, up on Miss Burns.
At lepping the fences they always take turns.
It's no matter how many purlers he crashes,
No matter how often his topper he smashes,
His heart is as stout and as true as they make 'em,
He'll finish good-humored though battered and shaken.
And Winnie, his wife, shows but little concern,
Except for the mare, when they meet at the turn.
She goes like a demon herself at the fences,
And loves it so much she's near out of her senses.
If she gets a refusal she'll ride 'cross the line
'Mid curses unheeded from the others behind.

Here's Nicky Tilney on Ellistown Boy,
He's riding bareheaded, with face full of joy.
A "broth of a boy" himself is Nicky,
Flies like a bird and never sticky.
At riding the drag or at any hunt-meeting
This lad and the black take a whole lot of beating.

Harry Lance on the cobby mare,
Rosy of cheek and with Saxon hair;
A gentleman farmer and soldier, too,
With a quizzical look in his eyes of blue.
A pioneer in this countryside.
He breeds good Scotties, and loves to ride.

Mac Pyle on Brandon, the breedy chestnut,
A leg for a boot and a girl's slender waist,
An eye like a falcon and picturesque taste.
Mac's a good one at hunting, a good one at law,
With as winning a smile as ever you saw.

Joe Willis on Drum Major,
Nose in the air and arms akimbo,
Top-hat too big, a jumping bimbo.
Wild as a hawk, but always cheerful,
Singing and laughing, never tearful,
The blithest guest at any dinner,
He'd make it go, the dear old sinner.

Here's William Mitchell on his big brown,
"Aux grand serieux" from his toes to his crown;
"The brigand" they call him, he looks so ferocious,
With enormous mustache and black scowl that's atrocious;
But his looks all belie him, he's mild as a starling,
And his manners most courtly proclaim him a darling.

Richard Stevens on a light-waisted mare,
They certainly look like a well-mated pair.
His bowler's tied onto his coat with a string,
His ears stuffed with cotton, his arm in a sling,
He's the picture of misery, spirits look low,
But he gallops with all of them—my, he can go!

Here comes young Charlie Scribner,
He's mounted on Moonlight, a spanking gray.
Modest and quiet in every way,
He's motored over from Princeton College,
To add to his store of hunting knowledge.
Lover of books and horses, too,
He's every inch a sporting "blue."

Then Western Sturgis, jumping crack,
With Captain Mitchell on his back.
He's fought the Moros in the East,
But rides light-handed, loves his beast.
A gallant soldier and a horseman,
He'll go the course with any sportsman.

Stuyve Pierrepont on Nora,
A smile like an angel, a heart of gold.
He's killed his big tiger, just as bold.
Once racing on Ajax he'd taken a tumble
And mounted again with no sign of grumble.
The field passed him by with a good deal of banter,
So he roused up old Ajax, and won in a canter.
He's mounted now on a grand little mare,
The kind that has always a leg to spare,
He's over her weight, but she's always game,
She'll be up at the finish just the same.

Now Towar Bates from Morristown,
Tools up a tandem, gray and brown.
His rosy face is kind and jolly,
He's full of nice good-natured folly.
His great top-coat and hat are swanky,
Squire Gray, the leader, 's somewhat cranky,
But Simple Susan's in the wheel,
And keeps them on an even keel.
A sporting tandem sure enough,
With all appointments up to snuff.
The Squire will gallop through the drag
Waving his tail-piece like a flag.
Always first flight, pulling, but glorious,
Then tandem home at pace that's furious.
You cannot kill the tough old gray,
His record's fifty miles a day.
Towar's a sportsman hale and hearty,
The very life of any party.
His brother Put is up on Pepper,
A well-made roan and splendid lepper.

The weight-carrying dun with Harry Hoy,
A regular "card," whose "bon mots" you'd enjoy.
He looks like a gourmet, dressed up like Beau Brummell,
With a brand-new pink coat and white gloves on his pummel.
Don't judge him o'erbearing or manners too rough,
He's really quite harmless, you can soon call his bluff.

The racing Barclays, round and plump,
They try to hold hands as they take every jump.
Dick Newton, the painter, distinguished and tall,
It will be a blank day if he misses a fall.

Looking as though he were out for the day,
Bill Larned comes up on a big half-bred bay.
The tennis champion without peer,
He ruled the courts for many a year,
And next to tennis loves good horses,
Foxes and hounds, but not race-courses.
He rides the drag with feigned disgust,
But without foxes drag he must;
He knows his way across the map,
And sometimes wears the Master's cap.

Silverskin with Arthur Whitney,
Silvery his hair, a statesman fitting,
Solid upon the gray he's sitting.
In politics he'll have his day,
We think he's much too good to stay.

Young Whitney Kernochan and Shelton Martin,
Damon and Pythias, seldom parted,
Two sound young sportsmen full of mettle,
Mounted on thoroughbreds of fettle,
They're keen as mustard in the drags,
And keener still between the flags.
Miss Meadows, Shelton's pet, is breedy,
And as we know is awful speedy.
Whitney will tackle any horse
And gallop hard on any course.
They're two keen youngsters always active,
Well-bred themselves, and most attractive.

Bill Whitehouse, Joe Burden, and David Dows
Ride up to the Master and all make their bows.
Carnation, the Gambler, Goliath they're sitting,
They're top-hole good horses with three types of bitting.
Carnation is wearing a little tom thumb,
The Gambler a great heavy bit and bridoon,
Goliath a snaffle that looks much like racing,
But all of them pull when they once start to chasing.

In the midst of the hounds sits Willie Howard,
Hardest of riders and never a coward.
He smiles at his hounds with a wide-mouthed grin,
And all of them wish that the drag would begin.

Larry, the whip, on one side of the pack,
Cracks his long lash and chivvies them back.
Larry is smiling and rosy and round,
A real hound voice with a lovely sound.
On the other side in the midst of a bustle
Chatters the second whip, Ernie Russell.
Ernie is nervous, high-strung, and slight,
Ready to gallop or ready to fight.

PART III

And now the last man has appeared,
Looks at the Master half afeared.
He knows he's full five minutes late
And hates to make the others wait.
The Master never says a word,
But slow to Willie gives a nod.
Up goes the horn to Willie's lips
And onto the air a sweet note slips,
Sweet as honey, but bitter sweet,
Pungent and piercing it fills the street
With the timbre of brass and the color of rose.

Quick! Every hound is up on his toes,
They look to Willie to lead them now,
Anxious, impatient, they long to go.

Even the field is beginning to fret,
When off jogs Willie on Ninette.
Down Morristown road he leads the pack,
With the Master and field some distance back
A mile or more along the highway,
Then turns to the right into a byway.
He pauses at an open panel,
Well marked by bits of scarlet flannel,
Then slowly lifts his velvet cap,
And Ninette pushes through the gap.
He casts his hounds across the field,
Knowing full well what scent will yield.

"Actress," good bitch, the first to catch it,
With brilliant nose and speed to match it,
Straight to the South she swerves with "Bluett,"
And all the pack scores quickly to it,
Willie and both the Whips go sailing.

The Master clambers through the paling;
After him comes the field complete,
All anxious for a front-row seat.
As soon as hounds are well away,
He waves his arm as though to say:
"Now, sportsmen, gallop hell for leather.
But don't break all your necks together."
The Secretary stands aside
To count the members as they ride.
Across the field they all go busting,
Ben Nicoll doing all the thrusting.

The first fence is a stiff four-railer,
Where one young sportsman "pulls his tailor,"
But all the rest get safely over,
And find themselves in Autumn clover.
The pace is hot, the scent is screaming,
And way ahead the pack goes streaming.
Westward they swing toward Mendham Church,
Leaving the stragglers in the lurch,
The first flight follows close behind.

Breasting the hills tests every wind.
Across the road hounds show no stopping,
And "in and out" the field goes popping.

Up on the right, atop the hill,
The Secretary Jack sits still.
He's cut the corners much as usual,
And sits there looking on, quite casual.
Over one fence he's slowly drifted
"Calling a cab" with right arm lifted,
His figure stands against the sky,
As all the field goes racing by.

Swinging right-handed round the pond,
Toward Ralston now the hounds are bound;
Through corn-fields full of standing spears,
Which make the horses prick their ears,
Across the grass and through the plough,
The field is gaining on them now.
Peach orchards slap them in the face
As 'twixt the rows the riders race.

The jumps are timber, nearly all,
But here and there a big stone wall.
Down past old Ralston Mill they fly,
Its red stone bulwark flashing by,
Then up the hill against the sun,
A big fence crashes Harry's dun.
Skunks Misery, that rocky cover,
Gives pause and time to think it over.
Then out again into the open
Up-hill to Chester hounds go loping.

In front flies Willie with the pack,
Ben Nicoll close behind his back,
His courage surely knows no bounds,
He's almost jumping on the hounds,
But Winnie, soaring like a rocket,
Has almost landed in his pocket.
Lady Augusta, up on Ascot,
With Alec Phillips for a mascot,
No time to lag, no time for laughter,
With all the rest "tincanning" after.
Miss Burns, though every fence is smashing,
With Arthur soon she'll be acrashing.
The Master lets them do their thumping
And loves to watch his field ajumping.

And now they're almost into Chester.
The last two miles have been a tester.
Hounds' heads go up and Willie's call
Sounds "Check!" with welcome rest for all.

Off slip a few to ease their mounts
Relief from weight, which really counts.
Others, as horsemen not so thoughtful,
Slip out their flasks and drink a mouthful.
Hounds roll about and yawn and stretch,
The horses nip a bit of vetch,
All happy in the brilliant weather,
And jolly glad to get a breather.

The landlord of the Inn comes bringing
A tray of glasses, clinking, singing,
And fills them up with Jersey Lightning,
Old Applejack, your belt is tightening.

From 'cross the road we hear a roar,
Standing in front the country store
A burly figure meets our eyes
And fills the air with strident cries.
Tune Mellick, "Mayor of Pluckemin,"
In broad-brimmed hat as black as sin,
The picture of a sturdy Boer,
He surely needs the Keeley cure.
He's raving drunk, or much elated;
Really the last, it should be stated.
"Hooray, hooray!" he loudly bellows,
"Fox-hunters, Gad, you bully fellows!"
He'd dearly love to join the game,
Farming to him seems awful tame.
We'll ne'er forget his booming cry,
Whene'er he sees the drag go by.

Then Willie briskly sounds his horn;
Across the fields the note is borne—
That throbbing note we love so well,
Soft as a flute, hard as a bell.

Round Chester village to the West,
Toward Hacklebarney in its nest,
The line's through country big and broad,
Then doubles back 'cross Chester road.

The highway's hard and slippery, too,
With faces grim they slam-bang through,
Most of the field gets safe across,
Only one thruster takes a toss.

Hounds now swing right, toward old Mount Paul,
Where Captain Hollond takes a fall.
In a smallish fence that's leaning to him,
Bacchanal crashed and, falling, threw him.

Threw him hard and he lay on his back.
You could almost have heard his collar-bone crack.
Two of the field pull up to help him,
But the rest of the hunt goes sweeping by them.

On, to Mount Paul, through its chestnut cover,
Up its rough slope to the top and over,
Then what a picture greets our eyes;
One's heart beats faster in glad surprise.

There, stretched out to the South in view
The Peapack Valley and hills of blue—
A valley of grass and a line to follow,
Toward Gladstone and Peapack in their hollow,
A line to gallop and jump at speed,
A line to test the worth of your steed.

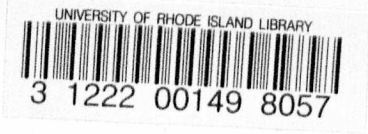
These last two miles are the best of the day.
Hurry down-hill lest the hounds get away!
Down to the valley the hunt all clatters,
Then they ride after hounds as though nothing else matters.

Cram down your hat and take a short hold,
In riding a finish you've got to be bold.
This is the time when blood will tell,
A touch with the spurs and ride like hell
Straight down the valley at racing speed,
Sail all the fences and never take heed.

Every horse at the top of his bent,
Every rider on speed intent,
Faster and faster the hunt sweeps along,
The thunder of hoof-beats hums like a song.

There's a broad open ditch in the field just ahead,
So crowd on more steam or you'll land on your head.
What does it matter if some one else falls,
Your heart beats faster and hot blood calls.

Then all of a sudden we hear "Worry! Worry!"
Hounds run over Dick with a drive and a flurry.
Willie raises his hand and the drag is done,
The field comes galloping one by one.
All pull up in a cloud of steam,
They call it "a day," and "the drag was a dream."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